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News Articles

OHVs seen as threat to forests

Deseret Morning News, Tuesday, January 20, 2004

By Leigh Dethman

Outdoor enthusiasts love the land — Utah's thick forest, winding trails and rocky mountain terrain. But some might love it a little too much, the chief of the National Forest Service says.

"There is an awful lot of people who love their national forests, and sometimes they just want to love them to death," Dale Bosworth said in a meeting with the Deseret Morning News editorial board.

The culprit? Off-highway vehicles (OHVs) that rip through the mountains, marring National Forest land and putting it at risk for excess erosion.

Bosworth said motorized vehicles should be limited to designated roads and trails. "The general cross-country use just is not appropriate anymore on National Forest land."

Keeping wayward OHV riders on the Uinta National Forest's 305 miles of designated motorized trails causes huge headaches for forest officials, said Loyal Clark, Uinta National Forest spokeswoman.

Some riders won't stay on designated trails and damage the pristine watershed, vegetation and wildlife areas, she said.

"It's our greatest challenge," Clark said. "It requires a significant amount of personnel and money to go in and rehabilitate and restore those areas once damage occurs. It's better for us to just now make those areas unavailable."

Bosworth appointed a special planning team to examine ways to manage OHVs on National Forest land. The team is lead by Jack Troyer, a regional forester for the National Forest's Intermountain Region.

Uinta National Forest officials are trying to find creative ways to keep OHV riders happy. Clark said officials might loop current trails together so riders won't have to travel up a trail and turn around once they reach the end of the road.

But more open trails for motorized vehicles won't get riders off back-country roads, Bosworth said. They want to feel the adrenaline rush of trying something nobody has done before, he said.

"I think there are more thrill seekers today than there were at one time," Bosworth said. "But I generally believe that people care. If people are doing those types of things, I think it is more out of ignorance than it is out of malice."

Forest officials and OHV riders must work together to find a common ground in balancing the needs of preserving the forest and the public's recreational wants, Bosworth said.

"We need to work with people in trying to find ways of implementing that and still allowing for people to have the opportunity to have ATVs or off highway vehicles," Bosworth said. "But we still need to make sure that we're not putting the land in a condition that won't be pleasant for the next generation or the generation after that."

Unmanaged recreation is one of four major threats facing the nation's forests and grasslands, Bosworth said. Other threats include the unnatural buildup of fuels, invasive species and the loss of open space.

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ATV impact

Vehicle use skyrockets, eroding Utah hillsides

Deseret Morning News, Wednesday, October 01, 2003

By Dennis Romboy

MANTUA, Box Elder County — The area known as Dock Flat in the mountains east of this rural town looks like a garbage dump.

Trash of all sorts litters the wooded campground. Much of it is piled in one place, giving the appearance of a budding landfill. Among the crumpled cereal boxes, soiled paper towels and plastic milk cartons is a bullet-ridden tool box and an empty five-quart jug of motor oil, the type that might be poured into an all-terrain vehicle.

Rick Vallejos, Wasatch-Cache National Forest recreation and lands officer, hasn't seen the one-time sheep docking station as messy. He plans to send a crew to clean it up.

But what he and other Forest Service managers can't clean up in a day or two is the spider web of ATV trails that run in all directions from the camping area.

The unauthorized roads and dead-end "high mark" paths on the hillsides wiped out vegetation and left the soil rock hard. Instead of percolating into the ground, rain water runs to a low spot where it eats away the earth. Known as a "head cut," the hole is big enough to drop a bus in. As the erosion continues, it will eventually be big enough for a fleet of buses. "Do you have a magic wand?" said Paul Flood, a Forest Service soils scientist.

Dock Flat and surrounding areas on the backside of Willard Peak represent an OHV "hot spot," the worst of the worst ATV damage, officials say. Similar hot spots dot the Wasatch Mountains. "Everybody has their own trail," Ogden District Ranger Chip Sibbernson said. "In a nutshell, that's exactly the problem."

Besides leaving ugly scars on the land, degraded trails ruin wildlife habitat and watersheds.

All-terrain vehicle use has skyrocketed in Utah in the past five years. Off-highway licenses issued in the counties adjacent the Wasatch Mountains increased more than 150 percent from 1998 to 2002.

The vast majority of riders aren't as careless as those who frequent Dock Flat. They resist the urge to plow into virgin territory, and they heed signs to stay on authorized trails.

But once someone carves a new road, others follow. The Forest Service tries to keep up with carsonite closure signs but the flexible markers usually last only year or two. Wooden barriers and boulders block some paths but even those aren't immovable.

"We have closed a lot up here but in our eyes, they were never legal roads," Sibbernson said.

Foresters have begun the process of revising the 15-year-old motorized trails plan in the Willard Peak area. Sibbernson envisions a well-mapped system featuring designated routes and loops similar to those mountain bikers use. The idea is to show riders where they can go rather than where they can't.

Money, however, is hard to come by. Partnering with local government and organizations, he said, is the only way to mend the fractured forest. And it all takes time.

"We'll probably be doing good if it's done in a decade," Sibbernson said.

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Rangers keep ATV users on the right track

Off-road vehicles causing damage to federal lands

Deseret Morning News, Monday, September 22, 2003

By Perry Backus

The Montana Standard

ENNIS, Mont. — On almost any given day, Jonathan Klein can find evidence of illegal off-highway vehicle use in the mountains of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest around Ennis.

High up, near the top of a lonely ridge in the Tobacco Root Mountains, Klein, a recreation specialist for the forest, and ATV ranger David DeSimone spy an ATV left just yards away from a Forest Service sign indicating the area behind it is closed to motorized travel.

There's no one around for miles and it would have been a simple thing to continue up the road to the top of the ridge. On almost any other day, no one would have been the wiser.

But these riders paid attention to the signs and stopped their machine. A closer look revealed the vehicle was both licensed and complete with the accessories needed to make it street legal.

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"This is what we like to see happen," said Klein as he climbed off his ATV and started walking up toward the ridge.

A few minutes later, the men came across John and Judy Hochmuht of Livingston, preparing to take a photo of themselves in front of the craggy peaks and mountain lakes that fill the background.

"There ought to be a good guy ticket," Klein told the Hochmuhts after introducing himself. "If everyone was like you, there would be no problem at all. It just gladdens my heart."

The Hochmuhts said they've been coming up to this area for the last 25 years. Recently, they traded in their motorcycles for an ATV.

"We're ridge runners," said John Hochmuht. "We just love being able to get up to areas like this."

"We appreciate being able to still get up here," Judy Hochmuht agreed. "Without having an open road, we wouldn't be able to do that."

But not everyone bothered to stop at the sign down below. On a nearby ridge a pair of ATV tracks wind their way up and over the top. Klein shook his head.

"That's just what we're trying to stop," Klein said. "That track probably started with one or two ATVs. Other people probably saw the track and followed it up the hill. In the thin soils that we have here, that track will probably be there forever, just like the old wagon wheel tracks that you can still see in some parts of the country."

Klein and other Forest Service officials are hoping that education might stem a rash of illegal off-highway use on federal lands. To help make that happen, the Forest Service and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks have teamed up to hire a pair of ATV rangers in the Madison ranger district of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge forest.

This summer was the second year of a \$28,000 grant from the FWP to help pay for the rangers who spend their time talking to all the ATV users they find using Forest Service roads and trails about their responsibility to the sport of motorized recreation. They also keep their eyes open for noxious weeds and put up signs to help people stay on the right side of the law.

"The rangers' emphasis is on education," said Klein. "Enforcement has its place, but we all know that we'll never be able to protect the resource through enforcement. It's too large, there's too many of them, and there are too few of us."

"We recognize that the use of ATVs is a legitimate use of the forest," said Klein. "It is troubling when we continue to see people using them illegally. The number of incidents that we are recording doesn't reflect favorably upon the sport of motorized recreation."

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said recently that the agency has identified four major threats to the national forest system. They are fire and fuels; unwanted invasive species; loss of open space; and the impacts of unmanaged recreation, particularly the unmanaged use of off-highway vehicles.

"OHVs are a great way to experience the outdoors, and only a tiny fraction of the users leave lasting traces by going cross-country," Bosworth told members of the Izaak Walton League in Pierre, S.D., in July. "But the number of OHV users has just exploded in recent years. Even a tiny percentage of impact from all those millions of OHV users is still a lot of impact."

Bosworth said the impacts come in the form of hundreds of miles of unauthorized roads and trails due to repeated cross-country use, more soil erosion, water degradation and habitat destruction.

There are also more conflicts occurring between different users of the national forest, he said.

"We've got to get a handle on that," he said.

Ultimately, the Forest Service is going to need some help from people who enjoy ATVs in the backcountry to ensure that the sport can continue at its current levels. In the Madison district, there are about 600-plus miles of roads, most of which are open to motorized recreation, and another 700 miles of trail, of which about 25 percent is open to ATVs or motorcycles.

"The options that we're faced with as land managers is either to encourage education or, if that doesn't work, then limit opportunities," said Klein. "We've had to close places before because of an inability to control illegal cross-country use."

"No one wants to be a fink, but ATV users do need to do a better job of policing their ranks," he said. "They need to let those few who can't follow the rules know they are giving the rest a black eye."

News Articles-Appendix A

ATV flips over, kills teenager near Kamas

Deseret Morning News, Monday, October 06, 2003

KAMAS (AP) — A 15-year-old boy has died in an ATV accident near Kamas. Summit County sheriff's officers said the youth was riding alone on Democrat Alley when he went off the road and flipped over about 6:30 p.m. Saturday. He was not wearing a helmet.

The boy's name has not yet been released.

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13-year-old injured in ATV accident

Deseret Morning News, Thursday, April 29, 2004

PLEASANT VIEW, Weber County — A 13-year-old boy was injured when he was thrown from an all-terrain vehicle Tuesday evening.

The boy was in the foothills of Pleasant View on private property, where he had permission to ride, North View Fire Capt. Nolan Cragun said. The boy was thrown from the ATV about 6:30 p.m.

He was airlifted to Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City and was conscious and breathing before he left. He was bleeding, had lacerations to his face and head, and was complaining of jaw and facial pain, Cragun said.

The boy was wearing a helmet but it was not strapped on. The helmet came off when the boy hit the ground. The ATV came to rest on top of his body, Cragun said.

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ATV accident kills boy on Willard Peak

Deseret Morning News, Sunday, June 27, 2004

A 12-year-old boy died on Weber County's Willard Peak Saturday in an ATV accident.

The accident happened about noon, as the boy was driving down the Willard Peak road and lost control when taking a curve, according to a press release from the state Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation.

The boy and the four-wheeler ended up 20 yards off the road at the bottom of a steep embankment. A female passenger also was tossed from the vehicle but suffered only minor injuries, the release states.

The boy's name and residence were not released. At the time of the accident, the boy was recreating with family members, who were riding two other ATVs.

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Appendix B

Activity 6.2 Myth Busting Cards

When making copies of cards. Copy the Questions on one side and the answers on the other. When making a master copy of the questions use the Myth Busting Card for the reverse side.

<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>1. Chasing or harassing wildlife and other animals from your OHV is OK if it is not during hunting season.</p>	<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>3. If you are riding and see an elk, keep your engine running quietly. Stay on the trail, and slowly ride away from the animal.</p>
<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>2. OHV use does not bother birds.</p>	<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>4. You can ride OHVs anywhere on public land.</p>

<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>5. Riding near the edge of streams and rivers requires special precautions.</p>	<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>7. Trails are most fragile in the springtime.</p>
<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>6. Removing the spark arrester from your OHV makes it go faster.</p>	<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>8. You don't have to ask permission to ride on private land.</p>

<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>9. Leaving gates as you found them is important to public land agencies and landowners.</p>	<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>10. Riding up and down a stream bank causes erosion and damages life in the stream.</p>
<p>Myth Busting</p> <p>11. You don't need a license to operate an OHV.</p>	

1. Answer - Myth

*Chasing big game from your OHV is illegal at all times. If you use your OHV during hunting season, use it only to reach the area where you want to hunt. **Never hunt animals from your OHV.** While chasing other animals may not be illegal it is unethical.*

*Big game congregate in areas called **winter range** during the cold winter months. These animals are often highly stressed in the winter due to cold temperatures and low quality of feed. Often times, winter range areas are closed to OHV riders to protect these animals. Respect trail closures on winter range that are intended to protect wildlife and their habitat.*

***Calving grounds** are areas where big game have their young in the spring. During this time, the animals are stressed and vulnerable to predators. Trails near calving grounds may be closed in the spring to protect the animals. Respect the temporary trail closures to maintain **Security Habitat** for wildlife and their young.*

2. Answer - Myth

Ground nesting birds may be highly affected by OHVs if people ride near their nesting areas. OHVs may directly destroy the nests or stress the parent birds so they abandon the nests.

*Special nesting areas are called **nesting grounds** and they deserve protection. Often times, trails are closed near nesting grounds **in the spring** when the birds are nesting and raising young. Respect the seasonal trail closures that protect valuable nesting grounds.*

3. Answer – Fact

*Stopping your OHV and getting off your vehicles, stresses animals and usually chases them away from you. If an animal **changes behavior** when you appear, you are too close and need to move away. Keep your machine running quietly and smoothly. Always **ride slowly away** from wildlife.*

4. Answer – Myth

*During certain times of the year, trails may be closed to protect the land or special wildlife habitats, such as **winter range, calving areas, or nesting grounds**. Before leaving on a ride, review a travel map to see if there are any travel restrictions on the trails you intend to use.*

***Wilderness Areas** are special primitive areas where motorized vehicles are not permitted. Respect Wilderness Areas that require foot or horse travel only.*

5. Answer – Fact

*The green ribbons of vegetation found along the edges of streams, rivers, and lakes are called **riparian areas**. These areas stabilize the **stream banks**, **filter sediment** to protect the water quality, and provide food and shelter for fish and wildlife.*

*Riparian areas are fragile and can be destroyed easily. Excessive use can result in loss of vegetation and increased **erosion**, which causes sediment to move into the water and reduces water quality. Protect riparian areas by avoiding them when possible. If you can't bypass the area, go easy. Don't roost (excessively spin) your tires and make sure to cross streams only at designated crossing sites.*

7. Answer – Fact

*Trails are wet and boggy in the spring because of snowmelt and rain. Depending on the elevation, trails can remain wet through early summer. When trails are wet they are very susceptible to **erosion** or soil loss. Trails become gullies and channel water, which then causes more erosion. Riding OHVs in wet meadows causes deep ruts, long-term damage, and scars on the landscape. Also, water bars in the trail are more easily dislodged when trails are wet. **Water bars divert water off the trail-always leave them in place**. **Autumn** is another time that trails may be fragile and eroded easily. Do not ride your OHV on wet or muddy trails. Respect temporary spring and autumn trail closures to protect the land. Failing to heed temporary trail closures may lead to **permanent trail closures**. Check with your local land management agency for trail conditions and closure information.*

6. Answer – Myth

*Spark arresters do not affect speed. However, **they do prevent sparks from coming off an OHV and can help to reduce the risk of starting a fire from sparks**. Never remove a spark arrester-they are legally required on public land.*

8. Answer – Myth

*Always **ask permission** to ride on private land, even if you know the landowner. Landowners will usually post signs to designate No Trespassing restrictions.*

9. Answer – Fact

If you come to a closed gate, make sure to close it immediately after you pass through. Never leave a gate open-even for a minute-if it was closed when you arrived. Closing gates is important to public agencies and landowners in order to keep livestock in pastures. To protect your right to ride, always leave gates as you found them.

10. Answer – Fact

Try to minimize your impact on stream banks. Don't ride parallel to stream banks and in stream channels. If you have to cross a stream, ride straight across the stream at a location with the least amount of grade. Whenever possible use constructed crossings such as bridges and fords. All wet areas are sensitive to erosion, soil displacement (ruts), and compaction. Avoid riding through marshes, wet meadows, or on stream banks and lakeshores. Be a good neighbor and citizen and take care of the land and water!

11. Answer - MYTH

In order to operate an OHV in Utah you must have either a current drivers license or have completed an OHV course and be in possession of an education certificate.

Myth Busting

Myth Busting

Myth Busting

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